



DIVINE INSPIRATION

unlocking  
churches  
in coventry  
& warwickshire

## Writing a Better 'Statement of Significance'

A Statement of Significance is an important tool to help both your worshipping congregation and people outside of your church community to understand the significance of the church building and its fabric and fittings.

Every church should have a Statement, not just in the event of a Faculty application being made. It should be a Statement that you revisit at regular intervals over the years and consider at all times to be a working document. It is a useful resource.

It should be **prepared independently of any Faculty application**, reviewed annually so that any recently obtained historical material or changes, such as an extension or reordering, can be incorporated, and a copy should be given to the Church Architect to include in his Quinquennial Inspection Report.

This three-part pack is designed to help you to organize your thinking as you prepare a Statement.

- The Top Ten Tips are your starting point.
- The check-list helps you to organise and share the tasks involved
- The resources list has lots of ideas about where you can find the information you will need.

Try to make the statement interesting and readable. Avoid making lists and using tables to display the information and don't be tempted to cut and paste paragraphs of academic material into the text. Be factual, concise and to the point.

The statement shouldn't be too long – two sides of A4 should be sufficient – but this will be determined by the importance of your building.

Use a clear font, like Ariel or Tahoma, and make sure the text is not less than point 11 or 12.

Write, store and send your Statement electronically, especially if it is accompanying a Faculty application. This makes the document easier to amend, share and read.

Nominate someone to take responsibility for the Statement. The PCC needs to take ownership of it and ensure that it is up to date and accessible at all times for others to share. If the person who wrote it moves away it remains the property of the PCC.

Further advice about writing Statements of Significance and Need can be found on the Churchcare website <http://www.churchcare.co.uk/>

## Ten Top Tips for Writing a Better Statement of Significance

NOTE: Tips 1 to 6 deal with simple facts and 7 to 10 help you to put flesh on the bones.

1. Begin by writing down **basic information** about your church such as its Listing Grade I, II\* or II. If it is in a Conservation Area state the name, and determine whether it is part of a scheduled ancient monument site.
2. Put together a **summary of your church's history** in a simple, factual and accurate form without unsupported comments or value judgments, e.g., don't refer to Anglo Saxon origins if no evidence can be cited. It should explain **the reasons why your church is the way it is** starting from its earliest known and recorded origins. It should include details of who made it that way in terms of craftsmen, particularly any architects if they are identifiable, and when.
3. It's important to **include a plan of the church**, date shaded to clearly show the age of different parts of the building. It doesn't need to be to scale but it should be as accurate as you can make it. Just as important is the inclusion of photographs of the areas affected by proposed changes marked up to give an indication of the likely end result.
4. Think about how you can describe **your church in the context of its surroundings**. State what contribution the church makes to the physical character and quality of its surroundings. Does it have landmark value on an eye catching site? Are there sightlines and vistas of the church that are valued. eg the south side of St Mary's Warwick is in a Canaletto painting. If yours is an urban church, what **impact** does it have on the streets around it in terms of architectural style and scale?
5. What is the significance of the **overall impression of the church**? Be descriptive and use simple terms like large or small, spacious or cramped, light or gloomy etc.
6. Is the church a **significant feature of county/national/international life** e.g. The history of Warwick St. Mary gives it a national importance because of the history of the Beauchamp chapel monuments and, as the county town, a county significance. The presence of the grave of William Shakespeare in the Chancel at Holy Trinity, Stratford upon Avon gives it an international significance.
7. When a Faculty application is made for changes to the church, the Statement of Significance is one of the necessary accompanying papers. The basic document should be **supplemented with more detailed information** concentrating on the particular areas of fabric or furnishings which would be affected by the proposed changes. For example, an application for removal of pews requires as much detail as possible on their age, who made them, and if there are pew platforms to be removed as well, information on what is beneath them i.e. solid floor or earth.
8. Some **value judgments may need to be made** about particular furnishings or fabric e.g. Bodley was a good designer but is a particular item designed by him considered to be a good example of his work? Is the organ a good example of the work of its builder? - there are a few around which are not! Such judgments may be needed from people with more knowledge than is available in your parish. The DAC can help you to find experts who can verify specifics.
9. **Include details about your churchyard also**. Identify your oldest graves and find out if any of them are listed in their own right. If parts of your churchyard have been re-ordered record it here. Consider the age of your trees. Find out if any of them have a TPO (Tree Preservation Order) attached to them and determine whether the Churchyard is significant in its own right as a landscape feature.
10. The PCC should **consider the impact of its proposals for change**, as expressed in its Statement of Need, in the context of the Statement of Significance. There is a presumption against changes to church fabric and furnishings by the Chancellor, and others who have to be consulted in the Faculty consultation process such as the amenity societies. The PCC, especially in potentially controversial proposals, needs to demonstrate that it has a **robust case** for changes based on a proper understanding of the implications of those changes on the fabric and furnishings.

## Check List for Compiling a Statement of Significance

Use this to assist you as you assemble the information for your Statement.

### **PART ONE**

Part One of your Statement will remain constant as a descriptive overview of your church and will only need to be amended if changes to the fabric are approved and carried out or if new information comes to light.

- Dedication
- Parish
- Benefice (if applicable)
- Diocese
- Listing:
- Conservation Area (if applicable)
- Archaeological significance of the building as a site. Is it a SSSI, for example, or a Scheduled Monument.
- Define your building in terms of its wider significance. Is it a nationally or internationally important place in terms of its heritage or what it offers to the visitor? Is it a county or regional landmark?
- Description of your location and setting:
- A description of your church's historic and current **use** by the congregation and local community if applicable
- Encapsulated summary of your building's history including architects, craftsmen etc:
- Significant events or personalities associated with the church or churchyard:
- Source a Ground Plan:
- List the dimensions of the church.

- Describe the materials used for building i.e. identify the kind of stone or roofing materials featured:
- A general description of your building as it is today:
- A description of your churchyard and any significant monuments within its boundary. Any buildings, flora or fauna associated with it:
- Consider the following and make a summary of each if they have significance:
- Altar ~ Reredos ~ Pulpit ~ Lectern ~ Font ~ Stained Glass ~ Wall Paintings ~ Pews and pew platforms ~ Monuments (internal and external) ~ Bells and Frame ~ Organ ~ Plate (noting where they are currently kept) ~ Registers (noting details of what exists and where they are kept) ~ other woodwork or metalwork ~ Communion Rails ~ War Memorials.

## **PART TWO**

This important part of the Statement depends on the kind of work you are proposing to carry out. You will need to write a summary appropriate to each application that assesses **the impact that the particular change will make to the fabric of the building.**

For example, the impact of the replacement of a stained glass window will be different from that necessitated by re-ordering to accommodate toilet or kitchen facilities.

Part Two will be added to Part One when application for Faculty is made and will be unique to that application.

## Useful Resources for Researching a Statement of Significance

- **Determine your listing**

By accessing the 'Images of England' site at

<http://www.imagesofengland.org.uk/>

and searching for your church. This is a national archive driven by English Heritage. All churches are featured if they are listed. There is also a good thumbnail sketch about the architectural merit of your building included. It is too academic to lift out and include in your SOS but it's a good start and will answer some questions you may have about your building. If your listing appears to be at odds with what you already assumed do check with EH.

- **Conservation Areas and Archaeological significance**

The following has details of where conservation areas are in Warwickshire. It also has plans of where new areas are being established. You may not be aware that your church is in a conservation area so it is worth checking.

<http://www.stratford-dc.gov.uk/Web/corporate/pages.nsf/Links/2662CAB6C1C42B9080256CAF0058EA6F>

In Coventry the following takes you to the details of where the 15 sites in the Coventry area are:

<http://www.coventry.gov.uk/ccm/navigation/environment/land-and-premises/conservation-and-archaeology/conservation-areas/?jsessionid=a1XhTzzqTcK9>

In terms of finding out about Archaeology in Coventry contact the Planning Archaeologist, currently Chris Patrick, on 024 76831271 and he can answer enquiries. In Warwickshire go to:

<http://timetrail.warwickshire.gov.uk/default.aspx>

To search for your building or you can make an appointment by contacting Museum Field Services at:

Warwickshire Historical Environment Record, Museum Field Services, The Butts, Warwick, CV34 4SS. Telephone: 01926 412734

Your churchyard may also be an SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest) in terms of its botanical specimens. This can also be checked with Warwickshire CC. They have audited most churchyards in our county and we have a list of any unusual species here in the office also.

The following link takes you to Caring for God's Acre, a site with lots of practical help for those needing to know more about their churchyard.

<http://www.caringforgodsacre.co.uk/>

- **Sourcing A Ground Plan**

The availability of this depends on the age of your building to a degree. The County Victorian History resources, which are found on-line, have some ground plans included in the material. You can find it through British History On-Line. This is free to register as a user and you can build up your own bookshelf of resources specific to your church.

<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/Default.aspx>

Church Plans on line also have a limited collection. When searching remember that our churches used to be in the historic Diocese of Worcester.

<http://www.churchplansonline.org/>

The following link takes you to a site called the Corpus of Romanesque Sculpture – don't let this worry you! – it has a list of 73 Warwickshire Churches and lots contain plans.

<http://www.crsbi.ac.uk/crsbi/frwasites.html>

Failing all of these, approach your architect. He may have a ground plan that he has used in a recent Quinquennial Inspection (QI).

- **Describing the materials used**

Take tour around your site noting the different stone used in the building and in the churchyard. Summarise the kind of burial ground you currently manage highlighting the tombs or graves that are important in terms of age or notoriety of those buried there. If you have any personalities or characters, say so. The thumbnail referred to in the section referring to listing usually makes references to material used.

- **General resources to identify detail about your church building and its history**

Books exist that summarise your church's history and architectural merit. You may have to consult several sources to build up a picture. Pevsner is a good start but your church may not be considered significant enough for comment from him!

**The internet** will always be your first port of call if you are trying to find out anything about your church and village. Use the images option as well as this will help to broaden your search.

**The local records office** now holds all archived Diocesan Records and they can be found at Cape Road in Warwick.

<http://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/Web/corporate/pages.nsf/Links/43D720C51D1CC89D80256A10003CC441>

Your 'Local History Society' will, no doubt, have a membership that includes people who aren't churchgoers who, nonetheless, have an interest in your church building and its history. They may already have collated invaluable information that could help with the research elements of writing the SOS.

**Your library** will have a Local Studies section and this may help.

**Your architect** may be able to provide you with archived material about your church, especially where improvements or changes have been made in the past.

**Divine Inspiration** has some resources in the office that they are happy to share at any time. We can also undertake more in-depth research on your behalf if you have reached a dead end! Do call us to see if we can help.

Here is our limited library as it stands at present:

*The Buildings of England – Warwickshire Pevsner/Wedgewood*  
*Old Warwickshire Churches – Hobart Bird*  
*The Church Bells of Warwickshire - Tilley/Walters*  
*Church Plate of Warwickshire – Jeavons*  
*Churches of Warwickshire (Vol.1) Old Warwick Deanery – 1847!*  
*Parish Churches of Warwickshire – Salter*

- **Photographic resources can be found at the following:**

<http://www.windowsonwarwickshire.org.uk/default.asp> for historic Warwickshire

<http://www.picturesofcoventry.co.uk/index.php> for historic Coventry

<http://www.stevebulman.f9.co.uk/churches/warks.html> Current Warwickshire

Be sure to get permission before reproducing images.

H McGowan  
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*If you would like help or support with any of the issues highlighted here please do not hesitate to contact us at Divine Inspiration on 024 7652 1306 or by e-mail on [Helen.mcgowan@divine-inspiration.org.uk](mailto:Helen.mcgowan@divine-inspiration.org.uk). Also see our website for more details about our project and how you can be involved. [www.divine-inspiration.org.uk](http://www.divine-inspiration.org.uk)*

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